

First Sunday after Epiphany – January 12, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 3:13-17 (NIV)

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14) But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15) Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. 16) As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17) And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

Our text presents some very dramatic scenes but before we look at them in greater detail lets go back a few frames to the scenes which took place before our text. In that scene we see crowds of people including many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to the wilderness where John was baptizing repentant sinners with water.

John's clothes were made of camel's hair and he had a leather belt around his waist. When he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees he unleashed a tirade against them calling on them to repent of their sins. He concluded by telling them that he had been sent as a warning to prepare the way for one who was much greater than he. (Matthew 3:11) **"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."**

First it was people from Jerusalem and all Judea and the region of the Jordan who came to John confessing their sins to be baptized. Then it was the Pharisees and Sadducees (individuals who boasted about their godliness rather than confessed their sins) who came to see John. And then our text tells us that Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John!

Wait a minute! Something seems to be wrong with this picture! John's baptism was with water for repentance. Since Jesus had no sin why was he coming to be baptized? That's a good question! In fact it's the same question that John himself had on his mind as he tried to persuade Jesus that his request was inappropriate as we heard in our text: **John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"**

Jesus, Why Were You Baptized? Let's use that question as our theme for today. Our text suggests two answers:

1. Jesus Was Baptized to Show Us Who Our Savior Really Is
2. Jesus Was Baptized to Show Us How We are Saved

Jesus was baptized to show us who our Savior really is. Our text tells us: **As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.**

When Jesus was baptized John applied water in a ceremonial manner much as you have seen happen in baptismal ceremonies here or in another congregation. John and Jesus were outside at the banks of the Jordan River and so they stepped into the water where Jesus was baptized. Out text doesn't directly say that Jesus was immersed under the water as some contend. It tells us that Jesus was baptized – the word simply refers to an application of water and that they stepped out of the water and that more importantly at that moment heaven was opened and that Jesus saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus and anointed him.

Anointing in the OT times was an outward sign that someone had been selected and appointed for a specific task. For example Kings were anointed with oil – oil was placed on their heads in a ceremonial manner. The Scriptures describe our Savior as one who would be anointed by the Spirit. In speaking about the chosen servant who would bring justice to the nations our OT lesson told us that God said: **Here is ... my chosen one in whom I delight: I will put my Spirit on him.**

The Holy Spirit was testifying that Jesus was the one anointed – set apart to bring justice to the nations. He was God's chosen Savior. In spite of how it might have appeared Jesus was truly greater than John the Baptist. There's more. **17) And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."**

With those words, God the Father spoke of the divinity of Jesus and gave his approval to all that Jesus had been doing. For 30 years Jesus had been silently keeping all of the commandments perfectly. He had offered perfect obedience to his earthly parents and to his Father in heaven. The Father in heaven is pleased with what Jesus has done. He is also pleased that Jesus is now getting ready for the next portion of his work of saving sinners. Jesus has lived perfectly for them. Now he will suffer and die for them.

The Father's announcement: This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased, validated Jesus' ministry. Whenever Jesus was questioned as to where he received authority to do what he was doing, he could point out that his work had been authorized and approved by the Father.

At Jesus' baptism the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit stood in agreement concerning our salvation and our Savior. *Jesus Was Baptized to Show Us Who Our Savior Really Is.* **Our Savior really is the son of God, the one promised and sent to take our place under the law and to fulfill all righteousness for us.**

Jesus was also baptized to show us how we are saved. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John protested. He realized that there was something wrong with the picture. He knew Jesus was greater than he therefore he was correct when he argued: **"I need to be baptized by you."**

Jesus began to put things in the proper perspective with one simple word in the Greek and three simple words in English: Let it be! "John, who are you to be arguing with me," Jesus asks. Since I'm greater than you let me decide what is necessary and what isn't. Then Jesus continued his explanation by saying: **"It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."**

Righteousness represents God's gracious policy toward sinners. His righteousness not only condemns and punishes, but it also delivers and saves as the Psalmist reminds us with the prayer: **"Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness."**

Jesus says that it was proper for him to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness. He had already accomplished some righteousness for us. But there was still something which he needed to complete. He was already actively and willingly keeping the Law of God being born of the Virgin Mary to his return to Nazareth with his parents where he grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and with men. Right from the start Jesus willingly lived a life free from sin – the kind of life demanded of each and every one of us. But now Jesus is going to begin the phase of his work in which he is treated as a sinner in our place. Ultimately he will allow himself to be killed and to die the death we deserved. He was the Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world.

Since John was preaching a baptism for the forgiveness of sins Jesus expresses his desire to be treated as sinner. He was like us in every way but was without sin – yet the as the Lamb of God he would bear the sins of the world as the prophet Isaiah had foretold: **“We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us turned to his own way; and The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** Later Isaiah spoke of the Lord making his life a guilt offering – an offering that would remove the guilt of our sins.

By insisting that John baptize him, Jesus shows us how he will save us from our sins. He will save us by being treated in the way we deserved to be treated so that God will **not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12) as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us...from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children--** (Psalm 103:10-17)

John listened to Jesus – since Jesus said it must be so, John consented. He willingly listened to his Savior who was willing to provide him with all the righteousness which God demanded.

Why was Jesus baptized? As we have seen from the picturesque events of our text he was baptized

1. Jesus Was Baptized to Show Us Who Our Savior Really Is
2. Jesus Was Baptized to Show Us How We are Saved

Our Savior really is the son of God, the one promised and sent to take our place under the law and fulfill all righteousness for us.

In a sense we can say that Jesus' baptism gives meaning to our baptisms. Because Jesus fulfilled all righteousness for us – our sins are washed away through baptism. Baptism saves us because it connects us with all that Jesus has done for us. The apostle Paul reminds us: (Romans 6:4) **We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

Previously Paul had already explained that because of the obedience of Jesus many were made righteous. Therefore since we have died to sin with Christ there is no reason for us to go on living in sins. That is the new life which Paul says flows from our baptism – a life of service to our Lord and to each other which expresses our appreciation for the Savior who **really is the son of God, the one promised and sent to take our place under the law and fulfill all righteousness for us** as we have seen through Jesus' baptism. Amen.